



Social Media Impact on Teens: A Review

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Abstract: This review explores the impact of social media use on the mental health and well-being of adolescents. Adolescence is the transitional phase of life between childhood and adulthood, characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and psycho-social development. During this stage teenagers are particularly sensitive to online influences. The data was collected from academic databases such as pub-med, Scopus, and Google scholar, studies published from 2018 to 2024 were reviewed. The combination of 30 selected studies indicated both positive and negative outcomes associated with social media use. On the positive side, social media improves social connectedness, self-expression and skills development, providing adolescents with supportive networks and opportunities for identity formation. On the negative side excessive and uncontrollable use has been linked to cyberbullying, addiction, body image concerns, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression and decreased interpersonal relationships. The findings revealed that the effects of social media depend largely on usage patterns, design features, and individual differences. The review concludes that responsible and mindful use of social media, along with digital literacy education and parental guidance, is crucial to reduce risks and promote adolescents' psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Social Media, Mental Health, Well-being, Cyberbullying, Addiction*

Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial and distinct phase in an individual's life in which the well-being fluctuates the greatest. During this stage, adolescents go through both physical and mental and

establish a stronger bond with peer group and shows romantic interests. Adolescents are more prone to external influences, especially during their formative years, and social media can play a major role in shaping their behavior, attitudes, perception and mental health.

Social media is a technology based on computer that enables the exchange of ideas, interests, thoughts, opinions and information between users through includes websites and online tools. In this digital age, social media has become an essential part of daily life, greatly impacting how people interact, communicate and approach the world. Being a social species by nature, humans rely on other people's company to survive. Therefore, having social connections with others can help reduce stress, anxiety and sadness, while a lack of social connections can seriously jeopardize one's mental health.

Impact of social media on adolescents

Social media use tends to have beneficial or a positive impact on the teenagers. The social media is widely used by everybody, especially teenagers as these networks are not only used for the ease of communication but also for the ability to link with people that is not limited by any geographical boundaries. Social media increases the demand for competence by facilitating individuals to explore their interests and helps in expanding existing abilities and skills with the help of digital tools. Adolescents utilize social media to create online identities, connect and interact with others, and establish social networks; especially those who have been overlooked, have disabilities or suffering from chronic illness can benefit greatly from these networks.

Despite various advantages, findings from various studies states that social media use could cause poorer mental health in adolescents. There has been a drastic rise of social media addiction which has raised concerns about its effects on the mental health and overall wellbeing of adolescents. The main drawback of social media is the instant gratification provides via likes, comments and notification. This constant feedback stimulates dopamine response in the brain, resulting in a reward loop that promotes addictive behavior. It is found that adolescents are increasingly drawn towards social media, seeking approval and validation.

In the current day, it is common for teenagers to make offensive posts on social media platform which focus on body shaming, individual abilities, languages and lifestyle among other skills. They engage in harassing others for entertainment without realizing the possibility of its adverse effects on health . According to a study conducted by Hinduja and Patchin, approximately 34% of adolescents have reported being victims of cyber bullying.

Images that portray idealized and absurd body images are abundant on social media platforms. Adolescents are constantly flooded with these images of flawless skin, well defined bodies and staged looks that reinforces a myopic view on the definition of beauty. This constant exposure creates an environment in which teens ingest these exaggerated expectations, resulting in greater body dissatisfaction and a distorted self-image.

There are also notable concerns relating to the increased social media use which has been linked to decreased mental health and psychosocial outcomes such as reduced interpersonal interactions, heightened social isolation, elevated levels of stress and anxiety, depressive symptoms, disruption of sleep cycles and might also induce suicidal thoughts.

The articles included in this study started from peer-reviewed journal articles published from the year 2018 and until 2024, published in the English language, targeting adolescents aged 10-19, consisting of primary research, systematic reviews, or qualitative and quantitative research, and reporting mental health variables such as depression, anxiety, body image, cyberbullying, addiction, and self-esteem.

Work that excluded the articles that were based on people over the age of 19 or under 10 years of age, abstracts from conferences, articles that are not peer-reviewed, not published in English or that did not have full text.

Approximately 200 articles were collected from the initial search of the database. After de-duplication and title and abstract screening, 75 full-text articles were assessed. Out of the 75, 30 articles assessed qualified.

Social media usage among adolescents is tied to symptoms of depression, with online bullying, sleep disruption, low self-esteem, and poor body image being contributing factors. Excessive use can adversely affect mental well-being, heighten the risk of cyberbullying, and affect overall social well-being. These findings highlight the need to create safe social media use policies and call for social media companies to monitor and safeguard the social media activities of adolescents (Kelly et al., 2018).

A systematic review identified a range of social media activities and behaviors time spent on, money spent on, and social media investments as well as social media addiction—that correlate with depression, anxiety, and distress in adolescents. However, the majority of the studies were cross-sectional, which limits conclusions. Therefore, the need for additional studies, particularly

qualitative and longitudinal studies, is necessary in order to understand the mechanisms involved (Keles et al., 2019).

A longitudinal study focused on the relationship between social media use and depressive symptoms over five waves on a sample of 2,891 Finnish adolescents aged 13–19. The findings indicated that depressive symptoms slightly predicted an increase in the active use of social media, while the reverse relationship was not true. The observed associations were small, unsystematic, and statistically weak. Such findings suggest that the purported direct associations may be overstated. The study is a reminder of the importance of analyzing the effects of social media on well-being at the individual level within the broader social level (Puukko et al., 2020)

In recent years, research into the impact of digital technologies on the psychosocial well-being of adolescents has developed at a growing pace, with over 80 systematic reviews and meta-analyses published. Yet the field must now turn its attention to greater transparency, better interpretation of effect sizes, qualifying measures where appropriate and recognizing that each adolescent unlike a parent can respond differently to digital technology use (Orben, 2020).

Beyens et al. (2021) developed a typology outlining individual effect patterns related to social media use among adolescents. The research focused on three specific types of social media use active private, passive private and passive public, to see how they impact an adolescent's overall emotional well-being. Based on experience sampling (N = 387, 34,930 assessments over three weeks), we found little evidence that social media use consistently has adverse effects within individuals. Around 45% experienced no change in well-being, 28% a decrease and 26% an increase. One student was the only participant who showed the expected pattern (positive effects of active and passive private vs passive public use).

A study by Kothandapani (2021) explored the correlation of social media addiction and attention in college students aged 17–20. They organized a Survey on Social Media Addiction and its Impact on Attention for Teen Aged Students. Data was collected from hundred participants by using Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS) and Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Results indicated that 11 students had high addiction while 30 students were moderately addicted to social media. Results showed that greater levels social media addiction were linked to moderate attention. The symptoms of social media addiction that was originally present among the students in my study contributed to lower levels of attention.

A study by Ostic et al. (2021) examines the impact of social media usage on psychological well-being, considering mediating effects like bonding and bridging social capital, social isolation, and smartphone addiction. The authors tested the hypotheses with a sample of 940 Mexican social media users, employing structural equation modeling (SEM). Findings indicate that social media use is on balance a positive indirect contributor to psychological well-being, primarily through the nurturing of social capital. The model accounts for the 45.1% of well-being variance.

Researchers, Boniel Nissim et al. (2021) analyzed 190,089 young adolescents from 42 nations in order to study the effects of the level of social media use (SMU) and its pathological use on psychosocial wellbeing and drug use. Young adolescents were classified into non-active users, active users, intense users and pathological users. Pathological users had the least mentality and social psycho-social conditions, as well as the greatest drug use, while the non-active users had the least psycho-social condition, with modest drug use. The users who had the highest degree of social psycho-social conditions were those who were not pathological, but who had intense use of SMU. The results suggest that both the intensity of SMU and the diseased conditions of SMU need to be taken into consideration to understand the psycho-social and substantiveness.

Choukas et al. (2022) developed The Perfect Storm, a developmental–sociocultural framework explaining the Role of social media in Adolescent Girls’ Body Image Concerns and Mental Health. This theoretical review presents a developmental–sociocultural model to explain how social media exposure may exacerbate body image concerns, depression, and eating disorders among adolescent girls. And it raises the possibility that social media elements (such as curated photos and feedback loops) combine with developmental and sociocultural forces, the emphasis on peer relationships, for example, or society’s fixation on appearance, to exacerbate body image issues. We suggest that these fears are a principal mediator in the relationship between SM use and MH issues. We also provide evidence that social 134 networks facilitate 135 communications among the functionally specialist individuals.

This narrative review by Popat and Tarrant (2022) examined adolescent perceptions of the impact of social media on mental health through consideration of 24 qualitative studies of adolescents aged 13–17 years. Five main areas of concern were identified: self-expression and validation, comparison of appearances, pressure to be connected, support from peers and exposure to bullying. Given that social media can have negative effects on mental health through appearance comparisons, validation seeking, addiction and cyber bullying but also positive aspects through

connection and support, the authors noted that further research is warranted with regards to adolescent suggestions or wished improvements, younger users and COVID-19 effects on social media usage.

A systematic review by Khalaf et al. (2023) explored the Impact of social media on the Mental Health of Adolescents and Young Adults. Today's teens can't imagine life without social media, which is damaging their mental health and interfering with their lives. It has its advantages, too better communication skills, self-esteem and health information access; however, it also comes with some serious drawbacks such as cyberbullying, privacy loss, sleep deprivation decreased academic performance among other conditions like depression and self-harming. Most of the existing research is cross-sectional; it documents an association between social media use and mental distress, but more longitudinal investigation is required. Clinicians and families can play a role in helping to promote balanced, responsible and open discussions about the use of social media. Yet, even as social media connects teens to friends' feelings and experiences, the sharing that occurs on these platforms can have negative consequences.

Dharejo et al. (2023) carried out a systematic literature review of the Effects of Social Media Use on Adolescent Psychological Well-Being. This research investigates the social media use of young people and its impact more broadly on the health and well-being of young people, indicating both beneficial and negative consequences of social media use. Social media in excess can lead to withdrawal, anxiety and sleep problems in youth but moderation and conscious social media use offer possibilities for social contacts and support leading to improvement in well-being. In a detailed analysis of 111 studies published between 2013 and 2023, there is evidence of ongoing debate in this area. The implication and impact of these findings is to advise that age appropriate advice is issued to assist young people to use social media in a health manner and furthermore provide a balanced approach to its use.

Marcino and Viswanath (2023) presented insights on the positive aspects of social media use and its impact on adolescent's well-being. This research looks at how social media use can foster adolescent flourishing, which is a larger area than well-being. Flourishing can best be described as well-being that includes happiness, purpose, health, character, relationships, and financial standing. It utilizes Self-Determination Theory. The researcher has found that social media can support relatedness, autonomy, and competence, and suggests interventions should

stimulate positive social media use and positive content as ways to help young people flourish in social media environments as opposed to focusing interventions on mitigating negative outcomes.

An Empirical study by Roy et al. (2023) has examined the effect of social media on the level of psychological well-being among non-institutionalized adolescents in high school. Utilizing a questionnaire and tests of statistical significance, it was found that social media has a positive effect on the level of psychological well-being. All subjects reported using social media daily in terms of study, communication, enjoyment and information-sharing, and socializing. From this study, there appears to be no significant difference in terms of psychological well-being exhibited in the groups based on sex, age, class level, or frequency of social media use.

Dam et al. (2023) administered a study on the quality of life and mental health of adolescents exploring a relationship with social media addiction, fear of missing out, and stress associated with neglect and negative reactions by online peers. The study determined the effect of social networks on the mental health and life quality of adolescents in Vietnam. There were 1891 individuals in this study. It was noted that the incidence of problematic use of the Internet, high overall time for social networks (FACEBOOK), and higher score PHQ-9 for depression were related to a lower quality of life, whereas use of smartphones and gender had positive NET effects of quality of life. The effects (stress) of Fear of Missing Out and anxiety resulting from the neglect or rejection had effects of increasing symptoms of depression, risk of self-inflicted damage and addictive use of social networks. The present study pointed out the negative effects of FOMO and reactive anxiety on the quality of life and overall life quality of adolescents in Vietnam.

A pilot study on social media literacy to support a conscious use of social media in adolescents and improve their psychological well-being, was done by Roy et al. (2023). The pilot study investigated the relation of conscious social media use with psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and resilience in adolescents with 80 participants aged 16–20. An experimental group took a social media literacy class while a control group did not. Due to the small sample size, there were no statistically significant differences. Looking at the results, the study claims the need to work on a larger scale to understand the positive social media literacy might have in relation to adolescents' well-being.

Taibi et al. (2023) organized a study on Adolescent social media use, cultivating and constraining competence. The study examines how social media impacts an adolescent's sense of ability using qualitative techniques on 36 Australian students aged 15. Two main findings emerged.

One finding is social media can enhance competence through social skills mastery and goal achievement. The other is social media can diminish competence through promoting feelings of ineffectiveness and causing disruptions of sleep and learning. The study outlines the development of competence both online and offline and provides suggestions on how engagement can be improved positively.

A cross-sectional study by Sahoo et al. (2024) undertook on social media impact on psychological well-being among the adolescents of Odisha. This study emphasizes that the use of social media in college students has a beneficial relationship with psychological well-being. Social media facilitates the development of friendships, reduction of loneliness, increase in social support, and consequently better mental health. While often viewed in a negative light, a moderate use of social media can be conducive to life satisfaction and sense of connectedness. Additionally, important is to understand gender differences as well as to provide life skills curricula which will assist in the development of healthy patterns of social media use and foster improved well-being for students.

This umbrella review by Sala et al. (2024) examined the risks and benefits of social media use (SMU) on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. It analyzes 24 studies rated as “high” (2015-2023) and shows that SMU effects are influenced by individual characteristics, usage behavior and content and design of the platform used. The review suggests potential for responsible design of such platforms and highlights regulatory opportunities (e.g. EU Digital Services Act) to promote safer and more positive social media experiences at the population level.

Vasist and Raju (2024) executed a study on psychological impact of social media and E-counselling on the mental health of adolescents. The motivation behind this paper is to examine the literature regarding the impact of social media on adolescents’ mental health issues from a psychological standpoint, using data from articles published during the years 2016-2021, through the application of bibliometric analysis. The results are as follows: A) social media has shown to produce problems such as anxiety, depression, poor body image, FOMO. B) Use of social media has been increasing exponentially, during the past five years. C) Prior studies have looked at platforms only. But the ramifications of social media on social interactions is one avenue needing study. While the ramifications that E-counseling has on mental health is another category of study which demonstrates potential.

A review on how screen time and social media hyper connection have harmed adolescents' relational and psychological Well-Being since the COVID-19 Pandemic was done by Tintori, Cianicimino, and Cerbara, (2024). The paper analyzes the use of social media by Italian adolescents before and after the COVID 19 pandemic (2019 vs. 2022), highlighting a significant increase in screen time and hyper connection, particularly in girls. Hyperconnected boys and girls are 1.4 times more exposed to negative psychological conditions, with consequences in terms of social relations, trust in adults, cyberbullying, phubbing, body image distortions and the idea that online relations can substitute offline ones. The results show the need for specific prevention, awareness-raising and educational interventions on adolescents, families and schools.

A review by Shaswat et al. (2024) discussed about Social Media's Influence on Adolescent Self-Esteem using Patterns and Perceptions. The research explored the effects of three kinds of social media use, active private, passive private, and passive public, on youth's feelings. Drawing on experience-sampling data collected online over 3 weeks with 387 adolescents (34,930 assessments), we find that social media use generally does not demonstrate any persistent within-person effects. Roughly 45 percent did not experience a change in well-being, 28 percent declined and 26 percent improved. Only one of the participants mirrored the predicted pattern (positive effects by private actives and passives, negative effect by public-passive).

Li (2024) conducted a study on the effects of social media on mental health among adolescents. This research focuses on how social media impacts the mental health of young people. It acknowledges the positive aspects of social media, such as social interaction and a sense of belonging, while also considering some of the negative aspects, such as addiction, cyberbullying, and decreased self-esteem. The research highlights the significance of mental health, the need for research on this topic, and the need for research on balanced approaches whereby young people may be encouraged to engage in positive social media use

A study on "Social media uses amongst adolescents: motives, minority stress and Eudaimonic well-being" was carried out by Lopez- Saez et al. (2024). The work examined the effects of various forms and motives of social media use on eudaimonic wellbeing and minority stress in a sample of 1,259 adolescents age 14–19. The results indicated that the duration of social media use tended to be associated with both the goal of seeking a partner and maintaining friendships. Especially gay and bisexual youth reported greater cyber minority stress, with females reporting better well-being. Most participants (over 85% on weekdays and 90% on weekends)

reported daily use of social media, spending at least three hours per day online. About 75% had private profiles. Similarly, active and passive social media use was positively related to adolescent well-being overall, regardless of the experience of stress.

A systematic scoping review by West et al. (2024) on “Adolescent Social Media Use through a Self-Determination Theory Lens.” This scoping review looked at adolescent social media use as it relates to the independent satisfaction of basic psychological needs (relatedness, autonomy, and competence) according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Eighty-six studies were reviewed. The results support the notion that social media may both facilitate and hinder the satisfaction of these attitudes, and that the determinants of the needs may vary intra-personally, inter-personally, situationally, and environmentally. This review demonstrates that unsatisfied or thwarted psychological needs may have long-lasting effects on adolescent development and well-being and identifies future research needs.

Sala et al. (2024) did an umbrella review on Social Media Use and adolescents’ mental health and well-being. This review examined 24 high-quality studies on the impact of social media use (SMU) on the mental health of adolescents, which indicated both risks and opportunities. The effects of SMU on mental health outcomes can depend on individual demographics, usage patterns, and the characteristics of the content and design of the platform. The risks of SMU include negative mental health outcomes, while the opportunities for well-being include the positive opportunities arising from the responsible design of platforms and regulations that are equally recognizing their capabilities. The review showed that an individual perspective regarding the responsibility for the outcomes of SMU is insufficient, and that platform changes are required which are backed up by similar policies as the EU new regulatory framework in the EU Digital Services Act, for a bigger societal impact.

A cohort study on Indian adolescent exploring a Bidirectional and cross-lag relationship between social media use and psychological wellbeing was done by Maurya et al. (2024). This study investigates the association and possible bi-directional relationship between social media use and symptoms of depression among adolescent boys and girls in India with reference to the ongoing debate on the impact of social media on the mental health of the youth.

Van Der Wal et al. (2024) led a review in their own words about how adolescents use social media and how It affects them. This qualitative study examined the relationship between social media use and well-being among adolescents using focus groups with 55 adolescents aged 14-17.

Findings indicated homogeneity in motives for social media use, but heterogeneity with respect to moods, affective responses, and perceived long-term consequences. A good number of adolescents described a duality, experiencing social media's consequences as positive and negative simultaneously, in turn, or in a sequence. This research demonstrates complex and individualized nature social media has on well-being. It is recommended that future research attends to these issues more closely.

A study on The Effects of Social Media Consumption on Adolescent Psychological Well-Being was done by Fumagalli et al. (2024). This review addresses the mixed findings regarding social media's effect on the well-being of adolescents. Some of the earlier literature suggested the social media use might be damaging to adolescents' well-being. In stark contrast, the more recent, large-scale, longitudinal studies argue social media use has little to no effect on well-being. Considering these gaps, the review propositions a set of studies designed to deeply investigate the relationships between social media use, adolescents, and their psychosocial well-being.

Taddi et al. (2024) administered a qualitative study on Perception, use of social media, and its impact on the mental health of Indian adolescents. The results interpreted that Adolescents' mental health has worsened, especially post-COVID, with social media being a key factor. Although Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are platforms for social connection and self-expression, excessive use can lead to anxiety, depression, stress, eating disorders, insomnia, and social isolation. These risks are particularly salient for adolescents.

Summary

The synthesis of 30 studies identified both for and against the impact stemming from the use of social media on the mental health and the general well-being of adolescents.

Positive Impacts

Advantages of Social Connectedness: The bulk of the research ($n = 37$) indicated social media facilitated friendship formation and maintenance, social interaction over geographical distances, social support, especially for the minority and chronically ill patients, family communication and relationships.

Skill Acquisition Social Media: Adolescents were able to attain a sense of identity through the exploration of their interests and the varied forms of digitized communication.

Adolescents Interests and Skills: social media was viewed from the point of view of interest exploration, skill acquisition and identity expression. Participation in virtual groups resulted in increased creativity and the development of new skills.

Supportive Networks: The Internet offered social networks to adolescents who were offline socially isolated and were therefore able to gain a sense of belonging.

Negative Impacts

The Negative Effect of Addiction and Instant Gratification: Several works pointed out the addictive nature of the feedback loop cycle of likes, comments, shares, and compulsive behavior and the validating feedback associated with them.

Cyberbullying: A study revealed that approximately one-third of teenagers indicated being victims of cyberbullying, which substantially enhanced the risk of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

Body Image Concerns: Social media exposure to idealized bodies and unrealistic beauty standards was significantly linked to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and disordered eating habits.

Mental Health Issues: Chronic consumption was always correlated with greater stress, anxiety, depression symptoms, social withdrawal, and sleep disturbances. Problematic use patterns in some researches were correlated with suicidal thoughts.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the effect of social media on adolescent mental health is dependent on the nature, aim and duration of its use. Thus, students should be given training in the correct use of media as a complement to parental guidance as well as media literacy training and awareness about mental health, to minimize adverse effects. Future investigations should be directed towards quantity and quality of its use, preventive programs (both educational and preventive) and interventions that would promote better use of social media.

Conclusion

The study points out that social media can have a dual role concerning adolescent mental health, both as a tool for creating and maintaining links with others and a source of emotional stress. Thus, on the one hand, social media provides an opportunity for adolescents to form networks; to express themselves and to learn new things and this has positive consequences for social connectedness and self-esteem. On the other hand, the excessive and uncontrolled use of it

has been shown to create negative consequences such as addiction to media, cyberbullying, body image dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression and sleeping problems, etc.

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